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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000484

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAIR](#) [KPAL](#) [MO](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI DIPLOMATS EXPECT MORE FROM MOROCCO

REF: A. RABAT 0290
[1](#)B. 08 RABAT 0648

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: Morocco and Israel took advantage of Israeli participation in the June 3-5 Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism seminar in Rabat to re-launch a diplomatic relationship that had been on ice since the Israeli military action in Gaza in December 2008 and January [1](#)2009. The Israeli director of Maghreb Affairs later told EconOff that Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary General Youssef Amrani had indicated willingness to resolve pending issues, including overflight permission, but that the Government of Morocco (GOM) had not yet delivered, an outcome she found unsurprising. The diplomat expressed the Government of Israel's (GOI,s) wish that the GOM more actively support Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and identified other possible "win-win" opportunities for Morocco-Israel cooperation. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Eynat Shlein-Michael, Director of Maghreb, Syria and Lebanon Affairs of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs accompanied her MFA colleague Israel Tikochinski of the Arms Control Department to the Seminar on Preventing Illicit Trafficking in Nuclear and Radioactive Materials held in Rabat, June 3-5 under the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT). Not engaged by professional interest in the seminar, Shlein-Michael told EconOff she viewed the conference as an opportunity to engage bilaterally Morocco's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MFA), renewing a relationship which had been cut off by the Israeli military intervention in Gaza.

MFA Eager to Highlight Israeli Participation

[1](#)3. (S/NF) Shlein-Michael related that MFA Secretary General Amrani sought her out for a pull-aside meeting during the June 3 MFA-hosted dinner for seminar participants, and profusely welcomed her delegation. He also made a point of introducing her to the French and Russian Ambassadors, she noted, apparently very pleased to highlight the Israeli presence. Shlein-Michael assessed, however, that Amrani's enthusiasm was not shared by all of the MFA, and working level officials had delayed issuing a letter authorizing visas on arrival in Morocco for the Israeli delegation until literally hours before the delegation left Israel. Without the mission's urging the MFA to act, the visit would have been impossible, she stated.

Delay in Overflight Permission is "Typical"

¶4. (S/NF) Shlein-Michael reported that her primary agenda item with Amrani was finalizing an agreement that had been pending for over six weeks to allow El Al Airlines to transit Moroccan airspace en route to Brazil, a routing that would save hours of flight time and thousands of dollars in fuel costs, and would also earn Morocco transit fees. Amrani promised her that the permission would be finalized the next day, Shlein-Michael stated, but the MFA had not yet finalized it as of two days later. Shlein-Michael indicated that she was not surprised by the delay, commenting that Moroccan diplomats frequently express their agreement with Israel but then do not complete what they have promised. "They like to talk a lot, but never deliver," she concluded.

GOM Was Ready for a Livni Visit?

¶5. (S/NF) Shlein-Michael further reported that Amrani enthused about the progress in bilateral relations that had appeared to be blooming in November 2008 (Ref A). It was a shame that former Israeli Foreign Minister Livni's hypothesized trip to Morocco had not materialized, Amrani told her, commenting that "we were ready for her to come in January." Shlein-Michael expressed skepticism of this statement to EconOff, adding that any thoughts of an ministerial visit have been scotched since the formation of the new Israeli government.

What Does Israel Want from Morocco?

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¶6. (S/NF) When questioned what Israel would most like to see from Morocco, Shlein-Michael immediately responded that the GOI wants the GOM to support the Palestinian Authority (PA). Morocco "does less than anyone," she complained, commenting that smaller states like the UAE and Oman were far more visible in lending support to Abbas. We want Abbas to succeed, Shlein-Michael continued, and we want Arab governments to visit him in the West Bank, publicly declare their support for him, and show the Palestinians that he has international legitimacy and influence. Shlein-Michael complained that, while Arab governments were lining up to demand Israeli facilitation of meetings with Arafat when he was confined to Ramallah during the second intifada, few are interested in visiting Abbas now despite the much more welcoming environment, and the PA's need for support against its HAMAS rivals. The GOI has made clear to Arab governments that it will facilitate the visits and that Israel does not request any bilateral component in such a trip. Morocco "has the same domestic concerns about HAMAS-type movements" as Israel and the PA, Shlein-Michael said, and it should have a keen interest in legitimizing the PA and Abbas against HAMAS.

Ideas for Cooperation

¶7. (S/NF) In addition to the most pressing issue of approving El Al overflight rights, Shlein-Michael suggested that another "win-win" issue for Morocco-Israel cooperation is allowing visas on arrival for Israeli tourists. The inconvenience of seeking a Moroccan visa in a third country significantly depresses tourism from Israel, Shlein-Michael asserted. Currently, about 60,000 Israelis visit Morocco each year despite the inconvenience, but that number would jump if Morocco allowed visa on arrival. Tunisia gives Israeli tourists visas on arrival, she noted, "and we have much better relations with Morocco."

¶8. (S/NF) Additionally, Shlein-Michael asserted that Morocco would benefit by engaging Israel on issues involving

international organizations. The GOM does not seek Israel's support on candidates for positions in international organizations or votes on Moroccan proposals to host international events. The GOI would often be willing to support Morocco's position on many of these issues, Shlein-Michael asserted, but finds out about them too late because of the lack of outreach from the GOM.

Comment: Slow and Steady

19. (S/NF) Amrani's reported enthusiasm to renew discussions with Israeli representatives highlights both the productive relationship that Morocco has shared with Israel in the past, as well as the serious damage done to that relationship following the Gaza fighting and the emergence of the Netanyahu government. While Shlein-Michael may see tepid actions by the GOM, public anger over the images of war in December and January have handcuffed the GOM's ability to continue business as usual, and it will take some time for that aversion to abate. Her critique of Moroccan policy towards the PA does not square with what we have heard from the Moroccans. The GOM still stands solidly with Abbas and has consistently ensured that its engagement with the Palestinians supports the Palestinian Authority against HAMAS (Ref B). We will continue to encourage the GOM to support the PA, and hope to see opportunities for the GOM to reach out to the GOI should conditions permit. End Comment.

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